

DISTRO PLATOON IN CONTACT!

Every experience provides an opportunity to learn, and my deployment has taught me the importance of being flexible and capable of adapting. One of the most important traits a Soldier or leader can possess is the ability to adapt and accomplish the mission, no matter how unexpected your mission and despite any uncertainty you may have.

I asked for the Screaming Eagles' Rakkasan Brigade because of their tough reputation and their early rotation on the patch chart. I wanted to deploy, and I wanted to have a high-speed job. When I got the assignment, I was thrilled. As a logistician, I prepared through my BOLC and branch training with intensity. Based on what my trainers told me, I imagined that I would be a distribution platoon leader, with a forward support company, delivering supplies on convoys to different places in Afghanistan.

But that did not happen. I got to my brigade and was placed in the Special Troops Battalion, where there are only two jobs for a logistician: Battalion S4 and Support Platoon Leader. Although I was disappointed I wouldn't be in a forward support company, I was extremely excited that I would begin my Army career as a platoon leader.

I got to know my Soldiers and NCOs, and learned the art of being a platoon leader. In garrison my platoon provided food, ammo, fuel and other supplies to the entire battalion. I trained my platoon for convoy operations, field feeding, fueling operations, etc. Then, two weeks before we deployed to Afghanistan we were attached to another company and given an unexpected mission set.

We were attached to Alpha Company, our battalion's Combat Engineer (Sapper) Company. The company's mission was route clearance and maintaining security in the ground defense area surrounding our FOB. My platoon's mission would be to help provide security in the battle-space around the FOB. In the short weeks before we left, we planned extra training to improve our infantry tactics such as: dismount patrols, infantry platoon collective tasks, tactical site exploitation, detainee operations, and traffic control points. The platoon had a basic understanding of the tactics we would need to know, but I was concerned that there was a difference between "knowing" and "the reality" of executing as a cohesive unit in combat.

Once we arrived in Afghanistan, I realized my missions were going to be very similar to what my husband would be executing at his Combat Outpost. The only difference was that my infantry platoon leader husband had been groomed for direct combat operations since his commissioning. I had received the most basic preparation for the missions we conducted, and I learned the majority of things I needed to know through "On-the-Job-Training" alongside my guys on mission. We conducted dismounted patrols to villages and I spoke with village elders on a daily basis. My platoon patrolled through the dark for hours to set observation posts on hilltops, and conducted combined cordon and searches with our Afghan counterparts. As a quartermaster lieutenant, I never imagined that I would have the opportunity to lead a platoon on missions like that. All my fears of us not performing as a cohesive unit disappeared as my platoon taught me, mission by mission, how fast Soldiers adapt.

DISTRO PLATOON IN CONTACT!

Our area of operations was not as active as others, but it still presented difficulties. In addition to the counterinsurgency imperatives of developing productive relations with the local key leaders, we had to deal with other kinds of challenges that units across the country had to deal with.

The first, and probably the last, time I led my platoon in direct contact with the enemy was on a dismounted mission. We were providing security for the Afghan Uniformed Police while they distributed humanitarian aid to villages near the FOB. Suddenly, we got caught in a near ambush. We had minimal cover when insurgents initiated the ambush with RPGs, and we all dropped down as they continued their attack with PKM and AK fire.

I could hear the RPGs exploding near us, but the enemy small arms fire and our return fire blended together. I evaluated where we were, an open area with minimal cover and high walls behind us, and knew we needed to move. We didn't know how many insurgents there were. After 4 rounds of RPG fire, I gave the command for us to bound forward out of the kill zone.

Some things we trained for and they happened automatically. My subordinates gathered their LACE reports and established security. Other things I was not trained for, and had to figure out on my own. I remember yelling for my interpreter and trying in vain to calm the AUP down. The AUP were extremely riled up and convinced they saw the insurgents run into a qulat. The TOC informed me they saw two insurgents drop their weapons in the nearby madrassa. Should I follow the AUP's lead or the TOC's intelligence? I chose the AUP because they were on the ground with me.

I informed higher that we wanted to pursue some of the insurgents. I took one squad and we bounded forward to qulats where our Afghan Uniformed Police saw insurgents run. There was more running, more stopping, and more gunfire. We had to run up a steep hill, and I remember thinking it was good that I had worked hard to be physically fit. Everyone was sucking once we reached the top of the hill, but we kept going.

At the qulats, the AUP led the searches and we conducted secondary sweeps. After everything calmed down we spent several more hours on scene. We captured and processed several detainees, a cache of weapons and ammunition, and dealt with one enemy killed in action. None of my guys were injured. We all patrolled back, and I was relieved when the last Soldier was safely back on the FOB that evening. Looking back on the experience, it seemed almost surreal.

My experience taught me that every man and woman under my command was flexible, adaptive, and would do what needed to be done – regardless of what their gender or MOS was. Every Soldier and leader, regardless of branch, military occupational specialty, gender or preconceived notions of what certain units do in war, should be ready to conduct infantry operations. I hope that my experience will encourage others in non-combat arms to keep an open mind to the different possibilities as they prepare for deployment.

DISTRO PLATOON IN CONTACT!

This story was shared by a YG 2011 Quartermaster Platoon Leader that recently completed her Platoon Leader time and a deployment to Khowst Province, Afghanistan.